

## PROFESSIONAL NURSES' VIEWS ON THE USE OF THE NURSING PROCESS AT THE 37 MILITARY HOSPITAL, ACCRA

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### ABSTRACT

This research study was set off to explore the views of nurses at the 37 Military hospital in Accra on the use of the nursing process. An exploratory descriptive approach to qualitative research was employed and the target population was all registered nurses working on the wards at the hospital. Consent was sort from participants who were purposefully selected. A total number of ten participants were interviewed based on data saturation and the data were analyzed using latent content analysis. From the data analysis, four main themes emerged. It was found that nurses were of the view that effective use of the nursing process will facilitate the handing over and taking up procedures which are carried out on daily basis on the ward, they were of the opinion that the use of the nursing process will add value to the nursing profession and help ensure professional autonomy. This will lead to improvement of the quality of care that the patient receives. It is recommended from the findings that there should be regular in-service training on the nursing process for nurse clinicians, to continually update their knowledge and skills on the use of the nursing process so that it could be effectively implemented on the ward and in similar healthcare situations. During handing over of the care that has been rendered to the patients by the nurses, the care plan should be a means of communication and it should be part of the patient's folder. Nursing administration should consider developing a standardized care plans which have been proven to save time in its utilization in the clinical settings.

**KEYWORDS:** Nursing Care Plan, Nurses Views, Nursing Process

### INTRODUCTION

The nursing process is a modified scientific approach of clinical judgment employed by nurses in patient as well as client care. As a tool the nursing process was initially developed by Ida Jean Orlando in the 1950 as nurses were observed in nursing activities. It has been employed over 25 years as a methodical or systematic approach to nursing practice [1]. It has also been described as an effective and efficient approach for establishing and organizing nursing knowledge as well as clinical decision making when providing patient and client care [1]. It is noted that the nursing process has been undergoing continuous re-evaluation and review, nevertheless the concepts or the ideas within the process still remain fundamental to nursing practice [1]

The application of the nursing process and nursing diagnosis has been identified as critical to nursing practice [2]. In order for the professional nurse to provide comprehensive care to his or her clients the nursing process has been identified as one of the tools for doing this [3]. The quality of nursing records reflects the quality of care that the patient

receives and hence all nurses working in Ghana are entreated to ensure that accurate documentation is always carried out about all procedures and care rendered to patients and their families [4]. It has been realized that the expertise and efficiency of nursing interventions depend on the accurate utilization of the nursing process. Also, important measures of the quality of care are those that focus on nurses' performance or the nursing process as expressed in nursing documentation [5].

### **Problem Statement**

The nursing process and the resulting written plan of care, improves communication through sharing of knowledge and information between departments and shifts as well as ensuring better communication with the multidisciplinary team. It also provides holistic and comprehensive individualized care through patient involvement, provides continuity of care, serves as an excellent assessment and documentation tool as it provides evidence of care given and allows for planning and evaluation of care. In addition, it also allows the nurse to spend time with the patient. The use of the nursing process also assists in easy recall of written information, increases quality of care rendered to the patient, improves communication with patients and their families and provides records of all tests undertaken [6]. Despite the benefits of using the nursing process and a written care plan, there is limited use of these tools by nurses in Ghana. This assertion is based on my personal observation as a professional nurse working for 15 years in Ghana. According to Addisson and Commey [7] the use of the care plan among professional nurses at the Korle Bu Teaching hospital in Ghana was found to decrease with increasing years of experience in the profession. The study however did not reveal the reasons for the reduction in the use of the care plan and hence it was not clear whether the decrease was as a result of the nurses' perceptions that they no longer need to formally document their use of the nursing process or the nursing process is a waste of time or they have little time to do the documentation. It is based on these notes among others that we decided to explore nurses' views on the use of the nursing process.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study was to explore the views or opinions of nurses on the employment of the nursing process in nursing care.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The objectives of this study are:

- To identify the views of nurses on the use of the nursing process
- To find the purpose of the nursing process from the nurses' point of view
- To find the effects of the nursing process on nursing care from the nurses view point

### **Significance of the Study**

The findings of the study will bring to bear what nurses think about the implementation of the nursing process and the importance that they attach to its clinical use. This will offer us a better understanding of how to improve the use of the nursing process by nurses.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The thoughts that nurses have about the nursing process and its importance to the nursing services rendered to the patient is believed to influence their willingness and consistency in documenting the rendered care on a care plan. The outcome of or the effectiveness of using different types of care plans have been investigated by some researchers, but studies about nurses opinions or views of using such care plans in daily practice are few [8]. A research finding on nurses' overall opinion on the use of computerized standardized care plans was that they facilitate their work and enhance their knowledge allowing them to improve the quality of care [9].

Similarly a study by [10] on nurses' experience of and opinion about using standardized care plans revealed that standardized care plans measure the nurse's ability to provide the same high quality basic care for all patients. The nurses in the study believed that the standardized care plan decreases documentation as well as redundant documentation. Likewise an ethnographic study by Rossi and Casagrande [11] on the nursing process found that the nurses in the study viewed the nursing process as a documentation activity and its methodology was often understood as a theoretical process.

A qualitative study on the perception of nurses on the use of nursing diagnosis in clinical practice by Axelsson, Bjorvell, Mattiasson and Randers [12] revealed that the nurses in the study perceived that nursing diagnosis clarified the patient's individual needs and thereby enabled them to decide on more specific nursing interventions. Nursing diagnoses were therefore found to facilitate communication between colleagues concerning patient's needs and care and thus promoted a continuity of care and saved time as well. Nursing diagnosis was also perceived to increase the nurses' reflective thinking leading to a continuous development of professional knowledge.

The few studies found on nurses' opinions addressed the use of the standardized care plans and nursing diagnoses but not the use of the nursing process itself. It is therefore necessary to explore further to know what the opinions of nurses are on the use of the nursing process.

## METHODS

An exploratory descriptive approach to qualitative research was employed in this study. This allowed the researcher to explore and described the various views and opinions of participants on the clinical operation or use of the nursing process. The setting of the study was the 37 Military hospital in Accra. The hospital shares boundaries with the Army Officers' Mess, Obasango Way, Maamobi Township and the Akuffo-Addo interchange at its northern, southern, western and eastern borders respectively. It is open to the general public as well apart from military personnel and their families. It provides health care service to several international organizations and Non-Governmental Organizations operating in Ghana and West Africa in general.

Nurses who have the license to practice nursing by Nurses and Midwives' Council for Ghana, who were permanent staff of the 37 Military Hospital with at least 12 months working experience on the ward constituted the population of the study. Registered nurses with less than 12 months working experience as well as those who met the above criteria but were unwilling to participate were excluded from the study.

### Sample and Sampling Procedure

The researcher visited the wards and explained the research to the ward in charge. With the assistance and

permission from the charge-nurses the research was also explained to the nurses and they were invited to participate in the study. In order to reach all nurses on the wards the researcher pasted a letter inviting prospective participants to take part in the study. The researcher arranged a meeting with those who expressed interest and gave detailed explanations the purpose of the study, how the data will be collected and their confidentiality was assured. Their voluntary participation was also explained to them as well as their freedom to decline from participation at any point in time without any penalty. For instance, they were informed that their participation in the study or not will not affect their employment in the hospital. Consent form was signed by those who accepted to take part in the study and a convenient date, time and place was arranged for the first interview.

### **Data Collection**

Data was collected with a semi-structured interview guide. The privacy of the participants were ensured during the interview. A voice recorder was used to record the interviews and this was carried out with the permission of the participants. A minimum of 45 minutes and a maximum of one hour were used for each interview. Data collection from participants continued until there was data saturation thus when no new or relevant data were materialized or forthcoming.

### **Data Analysis**

Data in this study was analyzed using latent content analysis and this was carried out concurrently with the interviews. Verbatim translation was carried out and the data was coded after the researcher had gained a deeper understanding of the data. Coding is the process of identifying persistent words, phrase, sentences, statements, themes or concept within the data so that the underlying patterns can be identified and comparisons among pieces of data can be made and analyzed. Categories were developed from collated data with similar codes and themes were then developed. Themes are thoughts or processes that weave throughout and tie the categories together [13].

## **FINDINGS**

Four main themes emerged from the study:

### **Nursing Process Facilitates Nursing Practice (Makes Nursing Work Easy)**

Participants indicated that when nurses are able to effectively implement the nursing process on the ward, it will facilitate the process that nurses go through during the handing/taking over procedure, when nurses hand over the ward to the incoming nurses who are expected to take up from these outgoing nurses. According to participants, the planned and documented care will make the above process simpler because it will be easy to know what has been done and what is yet to be done. This will enhance the provision of the right and appropriate nursing care to meet the needs of the patients. This was remarked by one of the participants as:

*“Like I said when we are handing over we tell the incoming nurse this is what we have done for the patient. But if the patient had for instance a care plan which would have taken into consideration the nursing process I mean you do not even have to say much, you take the care plan, look at it and you will see what has been done, where we left off and then you continue. I think it makes the work so easy”*

Participants were of the view that the implementation of the nursing process will direct the care that they provide to the patient and make them more focused. This was how one of the participants also put it:

*"It will make the work easy in the sense that when you come to work you will know what has already been done and what you are supposed to do for the patient and the patient will be well cared for and we wouldn't even find ourselves coming to work and sitting down doing nothing. So when we use the nursing process everybody will be on his or her toes doing something"*

One of the participants was of the view that, the nursing process when effectively implemented, will give them an idea of the outcome of the patient's condition after evaluation of the care that has been rendered. This was evident in the following comments:

*"I think using the nursing process will help us work easily. It will make us have objectives for whatever patient we are dealing with, and it will direct us and at the end of the day we will be able to know if we have achieved our aims or not. You know you are supposed to do A, B, C and D so it will flow but it looks like maybe you start from A end up in D and go back to B, and C. With the implementation of the nursing process, it will be easy to follow and it will make the work go on well"*

Using the nursing process will grant unto nurses the opportunity to plan the care of their patients and carry it out in a more organized way which in effect will make them work easily.

#### **Nursing Process Adds Value to the Nursing Profession (Nursing Valued Not Only in the Hospital but in the Society)**

Among the opinions explored in the study was that the utilization of the nursing process added more value to the nursing profession. Those participants who expressed this view indicated that, if nurses are able to effectively implement the nursing process on the ward, apart from the benefits that the patients would receive, the nursing profession would also be valued by the society in general as the society will view nursing as scientific way of assessing our patients and clients. This was how one of the participants expressed it:

*"I think it will actually improve the nursing profession. It will not only be to the benefit of the client but us the nurses as well. I think it is high time people realize our value not only in the hospital but I mean in the society. I know that through doing the right thing we can always defend ourselves, our image out there can be elevated, improved and we can gain back that respect in the country as a whole"*

Other participants were of the view that the planned and documented care will enable the nurse to identify all the problems with which the patient presents and none of the problems will go un-noticed. This is because proper records will be kept and it will add value to the care that the nurses provide to their patients. One of them remarked:

*"I think the nursing process is quite good, when we are able to implement it we will be valued more than the way we are valued now. Probably the patient may have some health problems but because we the nurses are not documenting their problems, sometimes you forget some of the things that are handed over to you. But if we were to plan we would have used the systematic way of caring for the patient, and this would have resulted in easy continuation of the care and make the care more elaborate and quite better than we are doing"*

Participants were of the view that effective implementation of the nursing process will grant the nurses the opportunity to put into practice what they have been taught and in effect add value to the nursing profession.

### Nursing Process Improves Nursing Care (Ensures Proper and Continuity of Nursing Care)

The nursing process was described by the participants as an important tool which can assist the nurse to provide proper nursing care to the patient. It can also serve as an important legal document which can be used in self-defense in cases of law suits against nurses. According to one of the participants:

*"I think it is an important tool which when actually used according to what we were taught in school we will actually give proper health care that the patient needs. This is because it is always there and it will guide you and other colleagues who were not even there when the plan was made. And this will ensure continuity of care. It will also serve as an important legal document for nurses"*

Other participants from the study also described the use of the nursing process as a means of assisting the nurse to identify the actual and potential problems of the patients. The identified problems will assist in planning care which will address the needs of the patients. One of the participants had this to say:

*"Sometimes a patient may be lying down who may need mouth care and we do not even know that this patient needs mouth care. So if you have planned and written everything down, you will note that this patient needs mouth care. Anybody who picks the care plan will know that he /she is supposed to do mouth care for this patient"*

The nursing process has been described as a very important tool that can help the nurse provide a better care which will improve the health status of the patient. It has also been described as a means of producing a credible data which can be relied on to defend the nurse in terms of planned and provided care in cases of law suits against the nurse.

### Nursing Process Promotes Professional Autonomy for Nurses (To Do What is Expected of Us as Nurses and We Can Always Take Our Position as Nurses)

The participants described the use of the nursing process as a means of allowing them to practice the nursing profession without waiting for instructions from other members of the health team. They indicated that the use of the nursing process will keep them busy implementing the planned care and they will be recognized as responsible members of the health team. This was how one of the participants put it:

*"I know using the nursing process will help us do what is expected of us and we can always take our stand as nurses. If we are able to do the right things through the use of the nursing process, we can all stand with our heads up with our other colleagues in the health team. I think it is high time the right things are done so that the work will also be carried on well and we will also be recognized if we are able to do the right thing"*

Other participants were of the view that if the care of the patient is planned using the nursing process it will become very easy for all categories of the nursing staff to carry out their duties with confidence and with little or no assistance. Also the patient's problems will be solved because their care was planned based on their individual needs. This was how it was expressed by one of the participants:

*"When maybe you are the junior nurse and you are left alone and something happens you may not know what to do, but I think with the care plan, you know that when you go to the ward and this happens this is how I should go about it and I think it will help us care for the patient in a much better way. We will not do things anyhow, and specifically when you are left alone you can do other things before the doctor comes and I think it will shape you better when you use it"*

Planning of patient's care using the nursing process approach will improve the confidence of the nurse to effectively implement the care without instructions from other members of the health team. Nurses will also not wait for medical instructions before they provide nursing care to the patient but they will carry out their nursing duties as expected of them as professional nurses. The use of the nursing process has been described to make the nurses work in an easy and well organized manner and also improves the quality of care that the patient receives.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Nurses in this study were of the view that effective use of the nursing process will facilitate the handing over and taking up procedures which are carried out daily on the ward. These procedures they believed ensured that there is continuity in the care provided to the patient so that there will not be repetition of an already performed tasks and procedure and this, in effect, will make the work of the nurses easier. This finding supports that of Axelsson et al. [12] who in their qualitative study on the use of nursing diagnosis in clinical practice reported that nursing diagnoses were found to facilitate communication between colleagues concerning patients' care and it made the work easier and ensured continuity of care.

It was also found in this study that nurses were of the opinion that the use of the nursing process will add value to the nursing profession and help ensure professional autonomy. This finding is in line with that of Axelsson et al. [12] who reported that nursing diagnoses were perceived by nurses to increase nurses' reflective thinking leading to a continuous development of professional knowledge.

This study also found that nurses believe that the implementation of the nursing process will lead to improvement of the quality of care that the patient receives. This finding is in line with that of Lee [8] who reported in a study that nurses were of the opinion that the use of the care plans facilitated their work and enhanced their knowledge allowing them to improve the quality of care. Similarly, Dahm and Wadensten [10] reported that standardized care plans measure the nurse's ability to provide the same high quality basic care for all patients. Axelsson et al. [12] found from their study that nursing diagnoses was regarded as a tool beneficial for planning individual care. Dunnion and Griffin [6] also reported that the use of the nursing process at the emergency department contributes to holism, increased nurse-patient contact time and better communication.

Findings from this current study revealed that the nurses were of the opinion that the effective utilization of the nursing process will let them be recognized as professionals in their own right who autonomously plan the care of patients and ensure that it is well implemented. This finding is in line with the findings by Repetto and Souza [14] who reported in their study on the evaluation of nursing care systematization through the phases of nursing process performance and registration that nurses believed that the use of the nursing process contributed to the autonomy and scientific basis of nursing practice. Similarly, Alvez, Lopes & Jorge [15] noted from their study that the nursing process was seen as a form of professional recognition with regards to the ability to allow nurses to practice with freedom of action. However, Doenges and Moorhouse [1] noted that institutional or organizational barriers such as lack of nursing autonomy and lack of time were the major obstacles to the utilization of evidenced base nursing practice.

## CONCLUSIONS

This study showed that nurses' views on the utilization of the nursing process focus on how the nursing process

facilitates nursing practice, adds value to nursing profession, improves nursing care and promotes nursing autonomy. These findings have helped us to define the purpose and effectiveness of nursing process in general and nursing care plan in particular on how to ensure the delivery of quality nursing care backed by scientific approach. In addition it has helped us to situate and define the professional nurses' unique position and function among other health team members.

## LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The setting of the study was only one hospital in Accra and hence the views of the nurse participants may be unique to only that hospital. Therefore generalization of the findings may not be possible, and therefore there is the need to do further studies in multiple settings.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations were made based on the findings of the study:

- There should be regular in-service training on the nursing process for nurse clinicians, to continually update their knowledge and skills on the nursing process so that it could be effectively implemented on the ward.
- During handing over of the care that has been rendered to the patients by the nurses, the care plan should be a means of communication and it should be part of the patient's folder.
- Nursing administration should consider developing a standardized care plans which has been proven to save time in its utilization in the clinical area.

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